

## An Exercise in Names, Labels, and Descriptions

Throughout the CEAC course, we encourage the students to limit the use of the verb ‘to be’. In the upper grades teachers may well require this limited use, and at times request that students eliminate it entirely from some of their papers.

An early use of the verb ‘to be’ occurs when children name items. “This is a rock, this a book, etc.” In kindergarten we requested teachers to ask, “What do we call this?” The children would then answer, “We call it a...” This simple exercise demonstrated that the words we use are merely names, labels, or descriptions. However no attempt was made to explain to the students why this was done.

Today’s exercise progresses slightly further. It demonstrates that the same object can have many names, labels or descriptions, but that changing the words does not change the object.

To begin, you need three balls in a container; a golf ball, a baseball, and a soccer ball. Remove them one at a time, and ask, “What do we call this?” The answers you could expect for the golf ball include of “A golf ball,,” “A ball,,” “A white ball,,” “A ball with dimples.” If you fail to get these answers, ask “What about a ....?” “Now how can one object have so many different names?” (wait) “Well, they are all names, labels, descriptions that we understand, and we learned as we grew up.”

Pick up the golf ball, and ask “When we called this all those different names, did this (point to ball) change?” (wait) “No, it stayed the same no matter what we said.” Point to the ball again and say, “It is what it is. No matter what we call it, it stays just this.” Close your mouth tightly and point to the ball.

Have the students come up with as many names/labels/descriptions for the baseball and the soccer ball. After they have run their course, ask, “What do we do with a soccer ball?” Among other things, play soccer. Now pick up the golf ball and ask, “If I called this a soccer ball, could you go out and play soccer with it? Would this ball change?” Pick up the soccer ball, “Could we play golf with this if we called it a golf ball? Pretty silly, right?”

Now pick up all three balls and ask, “Now I have three what?” (balls) “There we have changed the name again, but what do we know? These objects have not changed.”

“Now, what I would like you all to do, is point at the balls with your finger. Then say, ‘We can change the name, but the object does not change.’”

When the time comes to classify or categorize, your students should accept the fact that the objects in question can have many names without changing the object. In that manner they can fit into many classes and categories.